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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: RUSSIA, AFGHANISTAN, MIDEAST, IRAN, DAVOS,
SRI LANKA

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[¶1.](#) Lead Stories Summary

ZDF-TV's early evening newscast Heute and ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau opened with stories on the broad surveillance by Deutsche Bahn of its employees. Newspapers led with diverse stories, including stories on the Deutsche Bahn and the dispute between the Pope Benedict and the Jewish community. Editorials focused on Deutsche Bahn, the Catholic Church, and a few papers also commented on Russia's defense policy.

[¶2.](#) Russia Suspends Kaliningrad Missile Plan

ZDF-TV's Heute noted: "The presidential changeover in the U.S. obviously prompted Russian military leaders to reconsider their position, and they apparently no longer want to deploy short-range missiles.... The Kremlin did not comment on this but we can assume that the announcement had been agreed because the military leaders only did what politicians announced two days ago. Putin said in an interview that he is cautiously optimistic as certain signals were coming out of the White House indicating that the new Administration was reconsidering the missile defense system. So far, the Russian announcement is a symbolic gesture of goodwill: The Russians are no longer willing to play the bad guy in U.S.-Russian relations."

Under the headline "Rhetorical Disarmament," Sueddeutsche editorializes that "Moscow wants to renounce new missiles because America is calling an expensive project into question." The paper adds: "The changeover on Washington now offers the opportunity to remove the sad remains of the Bush era and improve relations without prejudice. The confrontation of recent years has destroyed much and produced little. Both new Presidents, Obama and Medvedev, are aware of this fact. Let's hope that they will not forget this when the economic crisis is over and Moscow's awareness of its own power is on the rise again."

Frankfurter Allgemeine comments that Russia "is only withdrawing an empty threat. This is not an extended Russian hand that must be accepted but rather a propaganda game with the fears of Europeans." Die Welt editorializes: "During the times of the Cold War, we would have called this a thaw. Now it's just a withdrawal of a few pieces in a great global game.... The Bush Administration's response to the potential future nuclear and missile armament of Iran had always been premature and diplomatically wrong."

¶3. U.S. Policy on Afghanistan

Frankfurter Allgemeine commented on President Obama's visit to the Pentagon and the situation in Afghanistan: "Concerning the primary goal, Gates was pleasantly realistic. It is still about preventing Afghanistan from becoming a platform again for terrorist attacks on the U.S. and its allies. It doesn't have to become a model democracy." Die Zeit wrote: "The irony could not be greater: Baghdad and the U.S. army win the 'evil' war in Iraq, but the 'good' war in Afghanistan is not going well at all. An increasing number of people are calling for withdrawing from there... But pulling out there would leave Afghanistan to revert back to Stone Age Islam."

¶4. Envoy Mitchell in the Mideast

Most German media reported that Special Envoy Mitchell continued his trip through the Middle East and met with Israeli President Peres. Frankfurter Allgemeine headlined: "Mitchell urges permanent ceasefire." Westdeutscher Rundfunk radio commented: "Mitchell has come to listen. This is a great idea because everybody in the region feels that they are remote-controlled by the United States."

¶5. Davos World Economic Forum

Under the headline: "Putin Warns Against Economic Egotism," and a picture depicting President Putin delivering his address in Davos, Handelsblatt remarked: "The beginning of the conference was dominated by President Obama's idea of setting up a bad bank in the U.S. Obama's financial advisor Laura Tyson said that the 'next natural step' to overcome the crisis would be to isolate toxic securities."

The daily editorialized: "While the United States was conspicuous with its absence, China courageously took advantage of the opportunity and filled the gap. With his European trip, China's President Wen Jiabao deliberately approached European managers and the political elite."

Sueddeutsche Zeitung also carried a front-page picture of Putin opening the Davos conference. The caption said: "Putin rejected protectionism and surprisingly warned against too strong a role of the state: 'In the old Soviet Union, the state controlled everything and in the end we were bankrupt. We do not want to experience this again.'"

In another report under the headline: "First Criticism Of U.S. Demands" Sueddeutsche wrote that "the new U.S. government must accept the first criticism from abroad. The reason is Treasury Secretary Geithner's indirect request to China to allow a revaluation of the Chinese currency. Following South Africa's Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, the head of the Asian Department of investment bank Morgan Stanley, Stephen Roach said: 'It is a horrible advice because a considerable strengthening of the Yuan would be economic suicide.'"

According to Die Welt, "Wen Jiabao's address, followed by President Putin's speech, are currently only offering an orientation for the illustrious circle of listeners, but no more. Nevertheless, 41 state leaders want to come, many finance ministers and central bank chiefs. This has never happened before, even though the new U.S. government is not being represented. The large number of politicians in Davos makes clear what the meeting is all about: the state leaders, but also the managers, want to get a feeling of what they can expect in the months to come. But all participants should be aware that a positive signal must emanate from this meeting. The global economy urgently needs signals that create confidence. And the number of leaders is evidence of the fact that unilateral moves

in this crisis will lead to disaster."

Regional daily Fraenkischer Tag of Bamberg argued: "A health resort is now to help the seriously ill patient. It would be a miracle if the meeting in Davos were able to help the patient walk again, for the global economy is still at the emergency care unit. A change of the environment for the elites of the most powerful nations in the world will be of little use for the time being. Several recipes for a recovery have been tested and now everyone is waiting for a sanitary effect. It is a fight against symptoms, while the reasons for the illness remain in the dark."

*6. U.S.-Iranian Relations

Under the headline: "Sharp Tones From Iran," Sueddeutsche Zeitung had this to say: "Iran's state leader Ahmadinejad answered the appeal of new U.S. President Obama with the sharpest anti-American polemic for a long time. The president is likely to have made his remarks also with a look to the elections in June. It is true that most of the Iranians want closer relations with the U.S. and Ahmadinejad is unpopular because of the bad economic situation. Against the background of the U.S. support for Israel, it would be appropriate for the president to pin his hopes much more than in the past on his radical standing voters who reject the U.S. and Israel."

17. Clashes Between Sri Lankan Government And Rebels

Under the headline: "India Can Help," die tageszeitung opined: "The world has more or less ignored the humanitarian disaster of which between 250,000 to 3000,000 Tamils in Northern Sri Lanka are affected. The Rajapaksa government is firmly determined to end its campaign against the Tamil Eelam Tigers (LTTE) only with their total annihilation. The daily massacres that the government is willing to accept should no longer be accepted by the world with a shrug. The EU decision to place the LTTE on the list of terror organizations has deprived the EU from the possibility to mediate in the conflict. Only India, where 60 million Tamils hope for a political solution of the conflict in the small neighboring country, is visibly interfering. It demands immediate access to the battle region for humanitarian organizations that want to distribute aid supplies from India. The EU should join this initiative."

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